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SUBJECT: KENYA ELECTIONS: MAIN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE ODINGA
LOOKING PRESIDENTIAL

REF: A. NAIROBI 2533
[1](#)B. NAIROBI 3676
[1](#)C. NAIROBI 3675
[1](#)D. NAIROBI 1669
[1](#)E. NAIROBI 3581

Classified By: Ambassador Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During lunch on October 1, the Ambassador discussed the electoral process with Raila Odinga, the main presidential opposition candidate. A relaxed Odinga was looking and sounding presidential, though he professed not to be overly confident. Odinga described the political strategy of his well-organized Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), and discussed the divisions that have thus far impaired President Kibaki's electoral campaign. Odinga stated clearly that the elections will be tribally-focused, and that he expects to benefit from growing anti-Kikuyu sentiment. He is also heavily courting the votes of Kenyans Muslims, estimated at ten percent of the population. Odinga said that, if elected, he would ensure a smooth transition, maintaining support for economic liberalization and seeking ethnic reconciliation, while intensifying efforts against corruption. Odinga cautioned about potential government misuse of resources in the electoral campaign, but made no alarmist or exaggerated claims. He acknowledged economic and political progress made during the past five years, saying that what is needed is a continuation and a new beginning.⁸ See paras 17-19 for an analysis of the dynamics behind Odinga's surge and implications of his possible election. At this stage, the race remains too close to call. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) During lunch at the residence on October 1, the Ambassador explored the electoral process with Raila Odinga, the main presidential candidate opposing President Kibaki in national elections to be held in December. The lunch was another in a series of close contacts that the Ambassador and Mission team have been maintaining with the main parties and candidates.

U.S. POSITION ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador reviewed the U.S. position with respect to the elections: we are neutral with respect to candidates

and parties, but insistent on the central importance of a fair, transparent, and violence-free process. Odinga had heard the Ambassador's speeches on the elections (ref A) and the electoral principles (ref B), and welcomed the ideas expressed in these remarks. The Ambassador made clear that he would continue to speak out if the principles were violated, as in the case of the recent violence at a campaign rally and following the political intimidation of a woman parliamentary aspirant (ref C). The Ambassador noted that the U.S. will field a strong election observation team. He reviewed what the United States is doing to support the electoral process, including support for domestic election observation, and for voter awareness and education (ref D). The Ambassador told Odinga the United States remains optimistic that there will be a credible, positive electoral process, and urged Odinga to continue speaking out against violence and exploitation of tribal politics. The Ambassador commended Odinga for having delayed a huge rally planned for Nairobi because it conflicted with a planned pro-Kibaki rally, rather than risk confrontation. (The rally was held in Nairobi's Uhuru park October 6, with an estimated turnout of over 500,000.) The Ambassador emphasized the U.S. interest in moving quickly to coordinate post-election priorities should Odinga be elected. The Ambassador also made clear that the United States would do its utmost to promote a smooth transition regardless of who is elected.

FRONTRUNNER AND BETTER ORGANIZED

14. (C) Odinga, who just days before the lunch suddenly emerged in polls as the front-runner, said he is anything but

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overconfident. He commented that polls are not always accurate, and he said he recognizes the formidable governmental machine and the money behind Kibaki's campaign.

However, Odinga said that his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party is better-positioned overall to win than is Kibaki's newly created coalition Party of National Unity (PNU). Notably, for example, Odinga expects to maintain relative discipline in order to have only one ODM candidate for each parliamentary seat, whereas he expects the coalition PNU not to be able to maintain such discipline among its members, thus dividing votes and increasing the odds in favor of the ODM obtaining a majority in Parliament.

15. (C) Odinga said that ODM is doing its own weekly polling both on issues and specific races. The ODM polls track closely with the national polls showing him significantly ahead of Kibaki. Odinga's comments reflected something we have heard from numerous other sources: that the ODM's war room and strategy are at this point far better organized than Kibaki's effort, which is rent by internal divisions. Odinga described these divisions in some detail, noting that there are at least three competing groups seeking to dominate the campaign: the technocrats, the so-called Kikuyu elders, and several key financial backers. As a result, the Kibaki campaign has been disjointed and without a coherent message, Odinga said.

STRATEGY FOR VICTORY

16. (C) Odinga is working to achieve victory on the first ballot, but is simultaneously working on a strategy to deprive Kibaki of 25 percent of the vote in at least four provinces, which would force a run-off. (Note: The President must be elected by a plurality of total votes cast and by receiving at least 25 percent of the vote in five of the country's eight provinces.) Odinga believes the ODM may be able to deny Kibaki 25 percent in Coast, Northeast, Western, and Nyanza provinces. Odinga believes that he will receive a plurality of all votes cast and at least 25 percent

in Coast, Western, Nyanza, Rift Valley, Nairobi, and Northeast provinces. Odinga noted that his and Kibaki,s base votes are about 30 percent each, emanating from their respective tribal groups, the Luo in Nyanza province and Kikuyu in Central province (see ref E for discussion of tribal alliances).

¶17. (C) Odinga said that the third presidential candidate Kilonzo Musyoka will take Kamba tribal group votes away from Kibaki (there are close Kikuyu/Kamba affinities which would predominate if Musyoka, a Kamba, were not running). Odinga previewed the defection of prominent Kamba politician and Minister of Health Charity Ngilu to the ODM (which subsequently became public). To add to his Luo support, Odinga noted his strong support in Western province, projecting 75 percent of that vote. Odinga sees the swing areas as Coast, Northeast, Rift Valley, and Nairobi provinces. He believes that Nairobi will break about 50-50 between him and Kibaki. Odinga feels (in an opinion that is widely shared) that former President Moi,s support for Kibaki in Rift Valley may prove counter-productive with Moi,s Kalenjin tribal group there, and Odinga claimed he will get 80 percent of that vote.

COURTING THE MUSLIM VOTE

¶18. (C) Odinga confirmed what has been evident in the media: that he is working hard to gain Muslim support (Muslims are estimated at 10 percent of the total population), particularly in Coast and Northeast provinces. He noted Muslim resentment about their historic marginalization and concerns about alleged extra-judicial actions by the Kenyan government against suspected Muslim radicals and terrorists. In addition to the Muslim vote (the Coast is only about half Muslim), Odinga is cultivating support among the Mijikenda and other coastal communities. The Ambassador cautioned

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Odinga about playing on Muslim fears about anti-terrorism actions. Although Odinga has been doing just that, he said he agreed. He claimed that he would, if elected, try to move forward with the long-stalled anti-terrorism legislation, but that he would carefully sell that to the Muslim community, something the current government has failed to do.

THE REALITY OF TRIBAL POLITICS

¶19. (C) Although agreeing that tribal politics are negative for democratic development, Odinga nevertheless frankly admitted that tribal politics will decide the outcome of this year,s elections (as most observers agree). What is emerging, Odinga said, is pent-up resentment against the Kikuyu for having dominated the government and the economy for such a long time, first under Kenyatta, then as allies of Moi, and then under Kibaki, following the failed promise of the 2002 pan-tribal rainbow coalition. In that sense, Odinga said, the outcome of the election could be similar to the defeat of the draft constitution in the 2005 referendum, which was seen as an anti-Kikuyu vote. (Note: Most observers agree that Moi's policies were specifically anti-Kikuyu and resulted in a reduction of Kikuyu presence in government and a corresponding increase of the Kikuyu presence in the private sector. End Note.)

¶10. (C) This anti-Kikuyu sentiment brings together views on a number of issues, Odinga commented. The youth vote, which will be potentially crucial in this election, views the current geriatric leadership as too tied to the past. (Kibaki is 74, his VP near 80, and a number of ministers are in their 70,s; Raila is 62.) The young and non-Kikuyus see that tribe as tied to pervasive corruption that has further skewed distribution of wealth even though the economy has

been growing at about 6 percent over the past five years. There is frustration that those known to have been involved in corruption are still associated with Kibaki (like Moi, Chris Murungaru, Nicholas Biwott, and George Saitoti, among others). Odinga also noted the widespread frustration over lack of infrastructure development which offsets Kibaki's strong record on education and health. (Note: Several of Odinga's allies are also well known for their ill-gotten wealth, including William Ruto, Sally Kosgei, and Cyrus Jirongo. End Note.)

KIBAKI'S HEALTH

¶11. (C) Odinga pointed out that his electoral chances are enhanced by the fact that he is younger and more vigorous than Kibaki. Odinga claimed that, while Kibaki's health had improved greatly since his accident and stroke in 2002, the elderly President remains on medication and is not 100 percent. That is why, Odinga said, Kibaki's handlers will not allow him to engage in presidential debates.

POST-ELECTION RECONCILIATION

¶12. (C) When asked, Odinga denied that he had ever said he wanted to arrest Kibaki and Moi for corruption if he is elected. Odinga said that he instead wants to see a practical process of reconciliation. This would involve, essentially, making a deal with the corrupt as a result of which they would return looted assets and be spared going to prison. In essence, this is a sort of plea bargaining, which the government has also indicated it supports.

CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS

¶13. (C) It is noteworthy that Odinga did not make exaggerated or alarmist claims. He was relatively low key, for example, about any abuses the government might be tempted to commit if

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they panic about re-election prospects. Odinga cited the danger of misuse of government resources and said local chiefs have been told by Minister of Security Michuki that they will lose their jobs and have to be elected (they are appointed now) if Odinga wins. Kibaki and his team are also warning that Odinga's support for ~~major~~ ^{majimboism} (strong local autonomy) will create chaos and reinforce tribalism. (Note: "Majimboism" was first promoted, unsuccessfully, immediately after independence by those who wanted to deny land ownership and other rights to Kenyans deemed not indigenous to a region. This idea is especially popular among the Kalenjin (Rift Valley Province) and the Giriama (Coast Province) and generally targets the Kikuyu. While classic "majimboism" is not universally popular, almost everyone agrees that there must be responsible devolution of authority and revenue to local government, one of the provisions that will certainly gain support in the next constitutional revision process. End Note.).

¶14. (C) In his only somewhat over-the-top comment, Odinga did express concern that the government) through influential business people) could attempt to manipulate the Nairobi stock exchange into a downturn, then blaming this on fears that Odinga might be elected. (Note: This would play on Odinga's past record in showing pro-socialist sympathies. He studied in East Germany, and it may not be insignificant that his son is named Fidel Castro Odinga. End Note.) Odinga stressed that, if he is elected, he will be a strong supporter of continued economic liberalization and the private sector (he's a businessman himself), but with equal emphasis on anti-corruption measures. Odinga said that he is

working to send reassuring messages to the Kenyan private sector, which at this point overwhelmingly supports Kibaki.

¶15. (C) Odinga did not ascribe great importance to the role that the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) and its widely respected chairman, Samuel Kivuitu, will play in the elections. Although the donor community is advocating for Kivuitu's extension beyond the December 2 expiration of his term, Odinga argued that Kivuitu is not speaking out enough about alleged electoral abuses, including violence and misuse of government resources. (Note: The ECK's powers, by statute, do not come into effect until the formal campaign period begins. End Note.)

ODINGA'S PERSONAL SECURITY

¶16. (C) Asked about his personal security (Kenya has not suffered from a successful coup, but has suffered a number of high profile political assassinations), Odinga said that a former commissioner of police is handling that issue. ODM planned to present a proposal to the government on October 2 laying out security needs. Odinga told the Ambassador (and subsequently stated publicly) that the ODM had obtained information that supporters of Kibaki were planning to have one of the candidates opposing Odinga for Parliament in Kibera slum killed, and then blame it on Odinga. Interestingly, a few days following the lunch that same pro-Kibaki candidate was arrested and briefly held after his bodyguards opened fire and killed two people when they were allegedly attacked while campaigning for Kibaki in Western Province. This politician is famous for ostentatiously handing out money to voters. It appears a mob formed prepared to strip him of all his assets, causing his bodyguards to fire. The other major pro-Kibaki candidate running against Odinga is Ndura Waruinge, the founder of the Mungiki criminal organization. Odinga also noted that he has a reasonably good relationship with Commissioner of Police Ali.

PERSPECTIVES ON A POSSIBLE ODINGA VICTORY

¶17. (C) As he was departing, Odinga agreed with the Ambassador's point that one could not deny the progress Kenya has made politically and economically during Kibaki's

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tenure, but insisted that Kibaki must also bear responsibility for all that has not been accomplished, particularly with respect to corruption. &What we need, Odinga said, &is a continuation and a new beginning.8 Sounds like a campaign slogan, the Ambassador commented.

¶18. (C) Throughout the lunch, Odinga was relaxed, looking and sounding presidential, and without the populist and sometimes arrogant swagger that he often projects. Odinga is part of the same traditional political class as Kibaki. His hands are not clean, though perhaps relatively cleaner than some. While he says he understands the need to reassure groups which feel threatened by his possible election, an Odinga victory would constitute a sea-change for Kenyan politics in several respects. It would be the first time a sitting President lost an election and handed over power to the opposition. It would represent a seismic shift in Kenyan tribal politics. Paradoxically, his election would in one sense be the result of the worst kind of tribal politics (playing up anti-Kikuyu resentments), but in another sense it might actually represent progress through Kenyans demonstrating their willingness to &try another tribe,8 a comment widely heard in different parts of the country. The responsibility would then be heavily on Odinga to prove his commitment to improve the welfare of all the people of Kenya. We should also reflect on our own rhetoric regarding the

maturing of Kenyan democracy and our faith in the ability of the relatively well-educated Kenyan electorate to set the nation's agenda for the next five years. Frustration with traditional politics) tribally based and dominated by an elite) could well yield an electoral upset. This election was seen as Kibaki's to lose as little as a month ago, but observers may have underestimated the Kenyan voters' desire for change and disillusionment with Kibaki's failure to live up to the unrealistic expectations he set in 2002 (including the now infamous &zero tolerance for corruption8 promise).

¶19. (C) Odinga is very much a member in good standing of Kenya's traditional political class, with all that entails. he is neither the dangerous revolutionary his opponents describe, nor the untarnished champion of reform that his supporters extol. An Odinga victory would, however, trigger expectations at least as huge as those that accompanied Kibaki's victory five years ago. Setting a realistic agenda, moving away from a tribally-based approach, and building on the substantial accomplishments of the past five years would be a tall order for Odinga. If he succeeded, he would leave a legacy) building on the six years he spent in prison under Moi) as one of the greatest Kenyan patriots. The stakes would be extremely high for the country. His failure would exacerbate tribal politics and move the country backwards. A Kibaki victory, on the other hand, would also be based largely on manipulation of tribal politics, but it would also represent continuity, with the accompanying mixture of accomplishments and disappointments. Kibaki will have to move quickly to develop a coherent team effort if he is to have any chance of achieving re-election. Odinga is confident that Kenyans are ready for change, and the latest polls seem to indicate that the country may in fact be moving in that direction. Much, however, can change over the next two months. There is a palpable excitement among Kenyan voters about the contest, which will likely prove close.

RANNEBERGER